

T³: Trustee Training Tips

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INVESTMENT POLICIES

As trustees change and library directors leave their positions over the years, some understanding of the history of a given library is lost. Policies are written and rewritten as required or as needed and, if not used occasionally, memory of them erodes as well. And all this leads to the question: did you know your library has an investment policy? Do you follow it?

Several years ago *all* government entities, including special taxing districts, were required to adopt an Investment Policy under KRS 66.480. This policy was to specify how the entity (library) would invest any money it had to invest.

To assist government entities in writing such a policy, a template was drawn up and widely distributed. The Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives (KDLA) advised public libraries to use the template or write their own, but reminded them that the statutes now mandated they have such a policy. As far as KDLA knew at the deadline for adoption, all public libraries in the state had some form of Investment Policy. This means your library should have one; do you know what it says? Do you do what it says?

Anticipating a considerable number of trustees may be surprised to learn they have such—not to mention a few new to new-ish directors—automatically brings to mind yet another advantage of each public library board collecting its *board* policies into some sort of manual. KDLA, though its regional offices, can assist with a template of either just the Investment Policy or the entire Board Policy Manual.

Now that you know you have such a policy, it's time to find it, present it to the current board, and determine if it still fits your library's needs. If not, revise it, being mindful of what is statutorily required to be addressed in such a policy. Once the board is satisfied with what the policy says, it's time to apply it to any discretionary funds the library may have to invest—short term or long.

TRUSTEE TRAINING OPTIONS

Library trustees are one of the most important volunteers for any library. They govern; provide adequate funding to use for adequate staffing, programming and building collections; construct and maintain building(s); and generally advocate for libraries throughout the community and political spectrum. All actions must be in adherence with federal, state, and local laws and within accounting and ethical standards. The task can be daunting!

Many new trustees sign on, armed with only a vague notion of assuming a public position that is subject to public accountability and scrutiny and besieged by conflicting expectations and demands. Many library board members may have prior experience in the *private* nonprofit sector. They often know how to conduct meetings, work with others on the board and in committees, and report to the members of the organization, but sometimes have little acquaintance with the requirements of running a *public* board. Such requirements include, among others, the Open Meetings Act, the Freedom of Information Act, and the Governmental Accounting Standards. The same predicament is often true for trustees recruited from the business sector. The valuable perspective that these trustees bring to the library board is often lost when there is confusion about the operation of a public agency and in the face of public demands and expectations.

In addition to the statutory requirements placed on boards, trustees are also expected to be involved in strategic planning, public relations, communication with government officials, and advocacy for better library services. It is difficult to reach this second tier of responsibility if the trustees are unsure of the basics requirements of governing the library. Unless they know what ques-

tions to ask, library trustees will not even make the best use of retained professional assistance in the areas of law and accounting.

Where do trustees turn for help? Fortunately, there are several resources available for their education and assistance. Many local organizations hold training sessions for various public officials or members of boards. While these opportunities may not be specifically oriented to the library trustee, valuable basic information may be gleaned on everything from the Open Meetings Act to operating budgets.

KDLA, with its field offices throughout the state, offers a variety of training opportunities for both librarians and trustees. Some entail a modest cost, but all are planned specifically to address library concerns. A standing opportunity is the Trustee Institutes each summer; check with your regional consultant or visit KDLA's webpage (www.kdla.net) for a schedule of these offerings in a location convenient for your attendance. Additionally, each library region in the state may offer trustee training locally. Check with your regional consultant for information and to offer suggestions for future topics. And don't pass on the opportunity to participate in a New Trustee Orientation—or even to come along with a newer board member for a refresher for yourself.

The Kentucky Library Trustee Association (KLTA) offers training specifically designed to address the needs of library trustees during its statewide conference each spring.

Make plans now to take advantage of these sessions. Trustees are too important a resource to waste!

--Adapted from Trustee's Corner, by Ellen Richardson
Michigan State Library Newsletter Access, 1999

PATRONS AS TRUSTEES

Being in compliance with Kentucky's term limits for trustees means continually thinking of potential new board members. A criterion often used is how much perspective nominees use the library, but is this the best litmus test?

This philosophy says that if you have experienced the need, you will understand how to create the product/service to meet the need. You can't understand alcoholism unless you've been an alcoholic, or understand the needs of abused women unless you are an abused woman. The thread of truth is that you can't understand it from that point of view, not that you can't understand it at all. But does a board member *have* to be an active user?

Look at the board members job description. The board exercises vision, plans, determines what is delegated to the director, sets policy, monitors and evaluates, and acts as community advocate for the library. Few of these require a patron on the board for the board to do its job successfully.

But board members must know what the patron point of view is to do their job. To develop plans, programs, and services, the board needs clear insights about the needs of its patrons. The board has to seek insights through community/client surveys, advisory groups, focus groups, etc. You don't have to be a heavy user to understand the library's needs, but you do have to ask them what they want and need if you want to serve them well.

This is not to promote a board of non-users, in fact, the entire board may very well be card-carrying patrons, but that should not be the only reason they are appointed. Each trustee should have the qualities and skills

your library needs now. And those qualities and skills will most certainly change from time to time. The ideal board member should be:

- recognized positively in the community, and able to represent the library in a positive way;
- a person with some leadership skills and business skills;
- able to work in a team environment;
- committed to the library;
- able to bring community needs to the library and library needs to the community;
- visionary;
- ready to give all the time necessary to do the job well.

Find a patron who meets those requirements, and you've got an ideal board member. Put a patron or anyone else on the board with few of those qualities, and you've done nothing but fill a seat.

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LIBRARY LETTERS

Dear Marian Librarian,

Recently our library received a large bequest and wants to invest it in ways not allowed by our Investment Policy. Since this is "found" money and not tax dollars that's OK isn't it?

-- Troubled Trustee

Dear Troubled,

You'd think so, but you'd be wrong! Every single penny that comes to the library, regardless of its origin, becomes public funds the minute the library accepts it. Legally you cannot set aside non-tax money as exempt from your policy, nor can you "hide" it from your auditor, the Annual Report, or anyone seeking information about the library's finances through the Open Records Act. A library might want to earmark it for a specific use, but it is still library money and must be used or saved with that in mind.

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?

The following quiz will let you test your knowledge on the topics covered in this publication. The answers are under "Publications" on KDLA's web page <www.kdla.net>.

1. True or False: A formal Investment Policy is a good idea for every library board.
2. Name three recurring opportunities to learn more about the "job" of trusteeship.
3. True or False: Having served on a nonprofit board, such as the YMCA or Citizens for the Arts, provides adequate training for serving on the library board.
4. Does a potential trustee need to be a library user?
5. Is it appropriate to use Book Sale money to treat the board members to a fancy dinner at an expensive restaurant?

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Answers to T3 Quiz

1. True or False: A formal Investment Policy is a good idea for every library board. [page 1]

Trick question: It's more than just a good idea, it's the law—specifically KRS 66.480. So, the answer would be false if you read the question to be asking if it's optional; true if you consider obeying the law to be a good idea.

2. Name three recurring opportunities to learn more about the “job” of trusteeship. [page 2]

- *KDLA Trustee Institutes each summer*
- *KLTA sponsored sessions at their annual conference each spring*
- *KDLA's regional workshops for trustees*
- *KDLA's locally held New Trustee Orientations—essential for new trustees, but a good refresher for seasoned board members. Accompanying the trustee also has the benefit of setting a good example of how serious the business of the board really is and can provide a mentor relationship to develop between old and new.*
- *Non-library specific training for board membership in general*

3. True or False: Having served on a nonprofit board, such as the YMCA or Citizens for the Arts, provides adequate training for serving on the library board. [page 2]

False. The key word is “adequate.” In fact, some library trustees find the switch from private nonprofit boards to public nonprofit boards to be quite confusing. Assuming they know the ropes, they attempt to fit the library board into a model that is not only difficult, but quite possibly illegal. Remember the library is a unit of local government and, as such, is subjected to many laws and regulations that private or charitable nonprofits do not face.

4. Does a potential trustee need to be a library user? [page 3]

This is strictly a matter of opinion. It is the opinion of your editor that the answer is “no.” But that doesn't mean the potential trustee doesn't value the library and won't take the job seriously. Special skills are needed from time to time and it is almost always valuable for the library to recruit trustees with these needs in mind.

5. Is it appropriate to use Book Sale money to treat the board members to a fancy dinner at an expensive restaurant? [page 4]

The rule of thumb here is would you use your tax revenues for whatever project, program, service, etc. you are considering. If the answer is “yes,” then it is appropriate. There is a slight trick in this question as well. Often the Book Sale will be a project of the Friends of the XYZ Public Library and the money from it belongs in their treasury, making this a moot question. If, as the question appears to imply, the Book Sale money belongs to the library, then it matters not from whence it came. Library money is library money is library money. All of it is to be treated the same. On a final note, it is a matter of board discretion whether or not they see a breach of ethics in rewarding themselves for their public service.